UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
BUREAU OF HOME ECONOMICS
WASHINGTON, D. C.

THE COLLECTION OF FOOD CONSUMPTION DATA

GENERAL OUTLINE OF AN ACCOUNTING METHOD

Purpose.- To obtain information pertaining to the food consumption habits of the nation in order to furnish a basis for work on the following problems:

1. Educational program in nutrition to improve the diet and to direct demand.

2. Programs in production and distribution to meet consumer's demand.

3. Comparison of food habits of various local, national, and racial groups.

Accounting method of collecting data

I. Equipment for each family.

1. Three liquid measures: Pint, quart, and gallon.

2. One hanging spring scale for weighing dry commodities (capacity 20 lbs., platform 18 to 20 in.); or 3 dry measures: Quart, half-peck, and peck.

3. Record sheets.

4. Pencil fastened to rack.

II. Procedure.

1. Family record

a. Address of family, - state, town, and county

b. Name of family

c. Exact date of period under observation

d. Total income of family, if possible. If farmers, the kind, size, and value of farm, and whether it is owned, rented, or worked by a hired man.

e. Description of family at home during the study, including sex, age, health, and occupation.

f. Total number of meals eaten from a source other than the household supplies during the study. Guests present at meals during the

study, giving sex, age, number of meals at which present. This should be obtained by the supervisor if the record on the daily sheets of the number of meals eaten is not entirely satisfactory.

2. Inventories.

Records should be made of the supplies on hand in the kitchen and pantry at the beginning and at the end of the period under study.

3. Daily records

a. The quantity and cost of each foodstuff brought into the kitchen for the family's consumption should be ascertained and carefully recorded on the daily sheet.

b. Waste

It is essential that some estimate be made of the edible food that is recorded but not actually eaten, and of its disposal.

c. Number of meals eaten by family and guests according to sex and age.

SPECIAL DIRECTIONS FOR COLLECTING FOOD DATA

I. Family record

The facts pertaining to the family on the family record sheet should be recorded by the investigator. If it is difficult to get a statement of the family income, it may be possible to get an approximate figure by suggesting income groups. That is, the housewife may say that the family's income is between $1000 and $1500, or $1500 and $1800.

Under "Date of study" give the hour for beginning and ending the study as well as the date. That is, if the inventory is taken after breakfast on a given date and the food consumption record begins with the noon meal make that fact clear by giving the hour, such as 10 a. m. Do the same at the end of the study.

The health of the individual may be recorded in many ways, but unless an intensive investigation of this point is to be included in the study, the use of poor, good, and excellent, to describe the apparent condition is adequate. The investigator might note under "Remarks" any special diseases or abnormal tendencies the housewife may mention.

II. Inventory.

Make an inventory of the foods on hand at the beginning of the study. Keep this record on the sheet marked "Food Inventory," in the columns under "Beginning of Study." When the study is over make another inventory of the foods on hand and put this record in the columns under "End of Study." For example:

Food inventory		Beginning of study Date: Oct. 1, 1925					End of study Date: Oct. 15, 1925					
Food	Description	Dry Lb.	Dry Oz.	Other Quan.	Unit	Cost price: $	Dry Lb.	Dry Oz.	Other Quan.	Unit	Cost price: $	
Milk	Whole	-	-	3	qt.	.14	.42	-	-	1-1/2 qt.	.14	.21
Flour	Wheat (refined)	30	9	-	-	.04	1.22	10	4	-	.04	.41

If the period for the study is to be short, for instance two weeks, the inventory should be quite detailed. If the record is to be kept for a year, only the large items need to be recorded.

III. Daily records

1. Food furnished by the farm or garden

Keep a complete record of all the food brought in for family consumption. Do not try to keep the amount used each day, but keep an accurate account of what is consumed during the period. That is, if 16 pounds of potatoes are brought in from the garden on the second day of the study, record the amount, 16 pounds, on that day and use them as you desire. If any are left at the end of the study, they will be deducted when you take the inventory at the end. Or, if you bring in any food from storage, e.g., bacon or lard, it should be treated in the same way. This rule does not hold for certain perishable foods, however. For instance, if you record 1 gallon of whole milk on a given date, and 1-1/2 quarts of skimmed milk from that quantity are not used by the family, make a note of that fact under "Waste of Edible Food" on the daily record sheet for furnished foods. For example:

Food	Description	Quantity	Disposal
Milk	Skimmed	1-1/2 qts.	Fed to hogs

The liquid foods should be measured as accurately as possible in pints, quarts, or gallons. The dry foods furnished by the farm should be weighed to the nearest ounce.

The price that you would pay if you bought the food in your community should be recorded under unit price (which means price per unit). The cost is obtained by multiplying the price per unit by the amount recorded for consumption. That is, if you bring in 16 pounds of potatoes, and these are selling at 5 cents per pound at the stores in your community, the total cost is 80 cents.

2. Food purchased

On the daily record sheet for purchased food record carefully all that you purchase. If you purchase foods by the pound you can use the weight recorded by the store instead of weighing it yourself. Please be careful to include the quantity purchased as well as the cost of every food recorded.

3. Number of meals served

On the daily record sheet for "Food Purchased" there are two lines for recording the number of meals served each day. This is very important. Do not neglect to keep this record. If there are three men in your family and they are present at all three meals, write in the line after "Men" 9; if two meals were missed, write 7. The other members of the family should be treated in the same way. Do not forget to include any guests that are present at meals.

4. Waste

On the daily record sheet for "Food Furnished by the Farm or Garden" several lines are provided for a record of the waste of edible food. By edible food is meant food that is suitable for human consumption. Refuse, such as bones, potato parings, banana skins, etc., should not be recorded. But if three fried eggs left from breakfast are thrown out to the chickens, that fact should be noted under "Waste of Edible Food." It is very important that this record of waste be kept as accurately as possible. If a quantity of edible food sufficient to serve one person is thrown out, it should be recorded as waste.